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Letter dated 30 August 1999 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Austria to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Twenty years after the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the General Assembly will have before it at its fifty-fourth session a new instrument which has the potential to greatly enhance the implementation of the human rights of women. The optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, when in force, will give women of the world the chance to bring their grievances before a United Nations treaty body, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1999/13 recommended to the General Assembly the adoption of a draft resolution on an optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women which contains as its annex the text on an optional protocol to the Convention. The text of the optional protocol emerged after a three-year drafting process that was marked by a high degree of commitment and a very constructive spirit in the ad hoc open-ended working group of the Commission on the Status of Women on the elaboration of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Women's groups and non-governmental organizations from all regions of the world have taken an active role in the process and have demonstrated great interest in the development of this human rights instrument which is shaped after the communications procedures of existing human rights treaty bodies.

In the above-mentioned draft resolution, which was negotiated and adopted in the ad hoc open-ended working group of the Commission on the Status of Women on the elaboration of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and has since been adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council, the General Assembly would adopt and

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open for signature, ratification and accession the optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Austria, having taken a special role in the elaboration of this draft optional protocol, respectfully suggests that action on the draft resolution by the General Assembly be scheduled at an early date directly in plenary meeting, in order to allow an appropriate date to be chosen for the opening for signature ceremony of the protocol. Austria is convinced that Human Rights Day 1999 (10 December) would be the most fitting day on which to open the protocol for signature. This would both underline the importance of the occasion and give due publicity to the Convention and this optional protocol.

My delegation therefore has the honour to request that item 110 of the provisional agenda of the fifty-fourth regular session of the General Assembly (A/54/150), entitled "Advancement of women", be also allocated to the plenary for the sole purpose of taking action on the draft resolution on an optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

(*Signed*) Hans Peter **Manz**
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